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## The IFOR/SFOR Experience:

### Lessons Learned by PFP Partners

by Jeffrey Simon

#### Conclusions

Among the Partnership for Peace states that participated in the Implementation and Stabilization Forces in the Balkans, the experiences of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Romania provide a rich summary of the collective lessons learned through these operations. Each of these four states:

- experienced strains and distortions in their defense budgets
- found it difficult to stand up their battalions and concluded that it would be necessary to establish pre-standing units for future peace support operations
- learned that military officers' language training needed to be improved
- determined that communications equipment and training needed to be changed
- saw IFOR/SFOR as a laboratory for deepening interoperability with NATO.

#### JOINT ENDEAVOR and JOINT GUARD

Once the Dayton Accords were signed, NATO broadened the terms of reference for Partnership for Peace (PFP) in December 1995 to include Opeace enforcement operations,' invited Partners to contribute forces to the Implementation Force (IFOR), and initiated operation JOINT ENDEAVOR. IFOR's primary mission was to maintain cessation of hostilities, move Serbs and Croats into separate zones, and to provide support for civilian implementation of the Accords.

Recognizing that maintaining a reduced military presence would be necessary to stabilize the peace after IFOR's mandate, NATO initiated operation JOINT GUARD in December 1996 and set up the Stabilization Force (SFOR) with the same rules of engagement, reduced force structure, and with a mandate until June 1998.

Thirteen of the 27 PFP Partners participated in the IFOR/SFOR operations. Of the Partners, Hungary's role was the most complex. Not only did it contribute troops as did Poland, the Czech Republic, and Romania; but Hungary permitted the temporary stationing of foreign troops in Hungary, provided transit support of foreign troops, and permitted their temporary stationing on Hungarian soil, as well as host

nation support for IFOR/SFOR troops in Bosnia.

## **Hungary**

Hungarian participation in IFOR/SFOR was challenging because its role and missions proved to be different from what Hungary had focused on in PFP exercises. It also represented the first time that the Hungarian Defense Forces (HDF) General Staff moved from a planning staff to an active participant in a NATO operation.

Hungary's participation in IFOR/SFOR involved the following three roles and missions:

(1) *Troop contributions.* After a Parliamentary Resolution, Hungary deployed a non-combat Engineering Battalion of 416 troops to IFOR in Croatia in late January 1996 under the operational control of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC), and since November 1996 under LANDCENT. During SFOR, the Engineering Battalion has been reduced to 310 troops.

The Engineering Battalion established its base in Croatia with an area of operations that covered all of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and it accomplished about 110 different tasks. These included building and restoring 19 bridges, rebuilding 20 kms of road, 65 kms of railroad line with five tunnels, and defusing land mines.

Initial problems arose when Hungary started to organize and train the unit. Because the battalion was not a standing unit and conscripts are prohibited from being deployed abroad, Hungary had to start from scratch. When the Bosnian mandate was extended and Hungary committed to a continued, but reduced presence, more than two-thirds of its troops had already served for one year. When fresh troops were needed for Bosnia, Hungary had to rotate its troops and found this difficult.

(2) *Support the transit of foreign troops and temporarily station some troops in Hungary.* Twelve nations (including the United States and Russia) have deployed and redeployed contingents to and from Bosnia through Hungary. By the spring of 1997, about 130,000 people, 13,000 aircraft, 1,100 railway convoys, and 65,000 wheeled vehicles had traversed Hungary. In addition, the U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) and the Nordic-Polish Brigade have deployed their National Support Elements in Hungary at Pecs and Taszar.

Being a transit country has been a challenge. Hungary has had to coordinate many military and civilian agencies and authorities (e.g., allied and national commands, the national railway, highway directorates, the border guard, and customs). Since many of these agencies are not under the HDFOs command and control, it has proven difficult to achieve national-level interagency coordination.

(3) *Host nation support (HNS).* Hungary also provides civil and military assistance to help foreign forces augment their logistics capabilities. In order to accomplish this task Hungary created a temporary IFOR/SFOR Operations Group and established a Logistics Directorate to contract for services needed by the U.S. staging base and the Nordic Support Group. Hungary also provided U.S. troops with barracks in Kaposvar and Taszar, an air base at Taszar, a heliport at Kaposujlak, and a firing range at Taborfalva. Despite some problems regarding labor laws with civilian employees at Kaposujlak and Kaposvar, the U.S. troop presence in Hungary has been generally favorable.

Since more than just military facilities were required, Hungary learned that it is necessary to establish an adequately-trained national level coordinating body. Another complicated problem has been the need to

harmonize Hungary's laws and regulations of financial, logistic, and administrative matters. Hence, NATO should make available to Partners standardization agreements (STANAGS) that relate to these matters.

In sum, Hungary's experience in providing HNS and in supporting the transport of foreign troops demonstrates the need to train civilians. It would be useful to have civilians participate in PFP exercises, and to broaden PFP exercises to include emergency planning. Hungary also needs to prepare peace support packages (to include designation of troops, units, equipment, and preparation of basic tasks) for future contingencies and to establish and train a national crisis-management facility.

## **Poland**

Poland contributed a total of 670 troops to IFOR and 500 to SFOR. Although there was not much time to prepare for the operation, the 16th Airborne Battalion-as part of a Nordic-Polish (NORDPOL) Brigade (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Poland), which was subordinated to the U.S. 1st Infantry Division in Tuzla, Bosnia-provided the core of Poland's contribution. To provide proper logistical support for NORDPOL, the Poles also attached 24 officers (18 during SFOR) to the Nordic Support Group in Pecs, Hungary. The Poles used the 16th Airborne Battalion because it was the only unit with indigenous logistics. As a result, Poland is now restructuring its forces to bring logistics to the brigade level, and then in the future to the battalion level.

Poland also experienced other problems. First, not only were the financial burdens of the operation significant, but regular troops could not be used because of legal restrictions which required that contracts be signed with them first. In March 1996, when operational costs skyrocketed to 72 million zlotys (\$26 million US) and it was unclear where the money would come from, the defense ministry cut purchases, reduced the number of recruits by 6,000, and trimmed many PFP exercises and programs. Legal changes have now been implemented so that Polish units can be sent abroad in the future.

Second, language problems were also evident during the operation. An English language proficiency at the 3-level proved inadequate for staff officers operating in the field; either at NORDPOL Brigade HQ at Doboj, Bosnia-Herzegovina-where 21 and 38 officers served during IFOR and SFOR respectively-or at the Nordic Support Group in Pecs, Hungary. Poland is making efforts to have commanders possess at least a 4-level language proficiency. In addition, language deficiencies appeared at the battalion-level, where it was discovered that privates and/or NCO switchboard operators needed English language training.

Third, Polish troops discovered that their communications antennas, which operated on Poland's flat terrain, were ineffective on the Balkans' mountainous terrain. Hence, the Polish units had to be re-equipped with new antennas.

Fourth, because the mechanized battalion received different vehicles in the field than they normally used, numerous accidents (to include fatalities) occurred. As a result, Polish drivers had to be retrained to operate the infantry vehicles.

## **Czech Republic**

The Czech IFOR contingent totaled 920 (30 at HQ, a Mechanized Battalion of 872 troops, and 18 for helicopter operations); and a SFOR contingent of 644 (22 at HQ, a mechanized battalion troops of 600 troops, and 22 for helicopter operations-the only non-NATO air units in the field). The Czech battalion

was incorporated in a Canadian brigade at Coralici that is subordinated to a British division.

Initial problems resulted because the Czechs lacked experience in operating in multinational commands and a Czech representative was not present in the British IFOR sector command in Zagreb. In SFOR, the Czechs are in UK HQ at Banja Luka. In addition, the Czech battalion staff and the Canadian brigade staff initially experienced problems because of communications difficulties.

During their earlier UNPROFOR-UNCRO participation in Croatia, discipline problems were rampant among troops, in part because two-thirds of the troops had been reservists. Hence, when the Czechs established their IFOR contingent they decided to staff one-half of it with reserve officers, who were either veterans of UNPROFOR, the Rapid Deployment Brigade, or the elite Prostějov Airborne Brigade. The Czechs have concluded that they want to decrease the percentage of reservists who participate in future peacekeeping operations.

As with other partner participants, cost was also a problem. Although the Czech Army was supposed to supply equipment and armaments worth 560 million koruna (\$20 million US), which were supposed to be purchased in advance against future budget items, the troops deployed only with what was currently available. As a result, numerous complaints arose from the field concerning problems with equipment, special hardware, lack of training for clearing mines, and disputes also arose over salaries.

In sum, the Czech IFOR/SFOR experience confirmed the need for common standards for the staff, common signals, intensive training of personnel with adequate language skills, and the need to build up a contingent of stand-by forces. These lessons are being incorporated into the training of regular troops, developing interoperability of brigade-level staffs with adequate English language training, and creating organic units with logistics independence.

## **Romania**

Romania, as with Hungary, contributed the non-combat Engineering Battalion 96, with 200 troops, to IFOR and SFOR, which was subordinated to the ARRC command in Sarajevo. Engineering Battalion 96 was created as a new structure with the assistance of the ARRC command. Its troops were selected from several units so that when replacement occurred, they would return to their units, share their experience, and develop a core level of competence among other units which might operate within multinational forces.

## **Lessons Learned**

- Hungary was unprepared to provide transit and host nation support for other nations. Because it lacked sufficient knowledge on what and how to accomplish the tasks, with whom to liaise and to coordinate among the various allied and national military commands and civilian agencies, Hungary needs to establish and train a national-level Crisis Management Organization.
- Because Hungary and Romania had to establish their non-combat engineering battalions from scratch and the Czech Republic and Poland had to flesh out their battalions, they discovered the need to plan in advance for different peace support contingency configurations, to include: manpower and equipment, indigenous logistics, and a timetable of tasks for activation.
- Limitations on the number of troops available for IFOR/SFOR operations were evident because of legal prohibitions against using conscripts, problems in the calling up of reservists, disputes over

salary, and shortages in adequately-trained staff officers with English language skills.

- As the length of the Bosnian peace support operation extended beyond one year, many Partners experienced a major challenge in rotating their troops when fresh ones were needed. As a result, many Partners are now changing their training and rotation policies.
- Participating partners view IFOR/SFOR participation as an extension of, and an added benefit to, their efforts to achieve interoperability with the United States and NATO. Hence, an unintended consequence of the U.S. "handing over" the post-SFOR operation to an all-European force could be a decrease in participating partners' willingness to continue in the operation.

#### Recommendations

- Since training of adequately-trained staff officers with English language proficiency remains a high priority, U.S. bilateral programs should continue to focus on these activities.
- PFP training activities need to focus on issues such as the transit of foreign troops, providing host nation support, and emergency planning; and, such training should involve civilians and General Staffs in such exercises.
- In order to improve the military planning process for future peace support operations, NATO needs to provide contributing Partners with necessary information at the outcome of preliminary planning and involve Partners in military planning as early as possible.

This paper was written as a result of a joint workshop hosted by INSS and the Hungarian Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies (ISDS) on May 9-10. About 30 people from six Partner countries and NATO participated in Budapest. For more information contact Dr. Jeffrey Simon, a senior analyst of INSS, at 202-685-2367, by fax at 202-685-3972, or via e-mail at [simonj@ndu.edu](mailto:simonj@ndu.edu).

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